
CHAPTER 6

Supporting Children with Challenging Behaviors

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In this chapter you will find information on the following topics:

- Steps for developing a plan of positive behavior support plan
- Suggestions for environmental and curricular adaptation strategies
- Strategies for supporting social development and emotional healing
- Strategies for enhancing a child's expression of communicative intent
- Resources for positive behavior support

Of all the challenges children present in the classroom, "behavior problems" are the most disruptive and perplexing to classroom staff and parents. It is not surprising therefore that problem behavior is one of the most frequently raised issues about the inclusion of young children with disabilities.

The approach that offers a meaningful way to think about behavior which is viewed as problematic and in need of attention is based on the assumption that these behaviors are meaningful and display communicative intent. Staff can then attempt to identify the communicative intentions underlying the behavior and help the child learn more acceptable ways of communicating. Thus, intervention programs focus on replacing inappropriate behaviors with successful communication experiences rather than eliminating the undesirable behaviors. For example, teaching a child to say, sign, or gesture "no" instead of throwing objects or pulling hair when they do not want to participate or comply with the request is a functional and positive approach.

Following is a list of practical steps for addressing the challenging behavior of

young children in inclusive classrooms.

1. If the behavior will stop on its own and no one is being harmed:

It is not necessary to intervene on every undesirable behavior especially if it is a one time or infrequent occurrence. Use the least amount of intervention necessary to enable the child to function and learn within the classroom environment. Often the natural consequences of the reactions of other children or more desirable and appropriate ways to behave will be all that is necessary to shift things in a more positive direction.

2. If the behavior continues or someone is getting hurt:

Consider the following:

- Remove events, situations, objects or individuals, which may be facilitating the behavior.
- Move closer to the child who is engaged in the behavior rather than verbally calling attention to the behavior.
- Touch the student gently to redirect attention or stop a disruptive movement.
- Use relaxation techniques such as an area in the classroom for the child to gain composure to assist the student in calming down. A back rub or a deep pressure hand rub may be calming. It is important to know the individual child's preferences and any sensory defensiveness before starting any tactile input. Some children's behavior will escalate with physical contact.
- Communicate positively to the child what he/she should be doing rather than using the words "don't" or "stop." You might say "chairs are for sitting" or "you may look at your book while sitting in your chair or choose an activity from the shelf."

collecting more information and gaining further input on the hypothesis. The team should formulate a behavior intervention plan that is proactive and supports the child for success (see example of behavior intervention program in chapter 6 appendix). It is important that all team members play a role in plan formulation to ensure that all team members understand and implement the plan correctly. The support plan should define the behavior and target the desired outcome as well as describe the specific intervention or procedure to be used. If the initial plan does not work, the team should problem solve and develop another strategy.

Intervention Strategies

Children with disabilities can be confused, stressed and bothered by demands, verbal directions, sensory stimulation, and expectations they do not understand. Their inability to express their confusion directly may result in disruptive or aggressive behavior. As early childhood educators, we look for ways to teach children which behaviors are appropriate. Depending on the type of problem behaviors and analysis of probable cause or communicative intent, intervention strategies are selected. Many of the following strategies not only benefit the child with disabilities, but are helpful suggestions for all children.

Nadine McBride and Carol Logie (1992) have identified common situations in which behavior problems are likely to occur and offer instructions into the problems and practical suggestions for strategies which will support more appropriate behavior.

Snack or Lunch Time

Typical causes of problem behaviors:

- child has problems transitioning snack or lunch area.
- child cannot understand the need to wait in line or at the table.

- child is bothered by noise and confusion of the situation.

Some strategies to try:

- give the child a transitional object symbolizing the event (such as a spoon, cup, lunch box) to hold on the way to the snack or lunch area (both to illustrate destination as well as to keep the child organized or focused on the upcoming event during the transitional period).
- arrange the child's seating so as to limit distraction and noise level such as on the end of the table or next to helpful and calm peers.
- provide the child with something to do while waiting for others to finish.

Changes in routine: (Events which happen routinely but not daily or that occur in a different sequence such as outdoor play at an earlier time or that are one time events such as birthday celebrations for a classmate.)

Typical causes of problem behaviors:

- child has difficulty dealing with daily schedule changes that upset his or her sense of routine.

Some strategies to try:

- post a picture calendar of activities for the week.
- present a picture schedule of the day's events.
- use an anticipation box (place objects which represent the day's activities in sequenced compartments within a box).
- give advanced notices of upcoming events that require change (tell the child of upcoming event shortly before the child must move to the new activity).

Transitions:

Typical causes of problem behaviors:

- child has difficulty transitioning between activities.
- child is uncomfortable not knowing what to do next.
- child has difficulty remembering the daily sequence of events.
- child has difficulty with any change.
- child cannot understand verbal explanations of what will happen next.

Some strategies to try:

- use an object to represent what will happen next for example a tooth brush for going to the bathroom to brush teeth. Keep the objects in a box (place the objects which repeat the days activities in sequenced compartment with a box)>
- use an anticipation book which is a series of photos representing what is going to occur next.
- use a picture or word series of events (a clothespin attached to where the class is in the sequence is helpful).
- prompt the child to watch and follow where the peers in the classroom are going.
- give simple verbal explanations before the change occurs such as " first wash hands, then lunch."
- use paper and a writing utensil, draw out the next activity (this provides a visual cue).

Activity focused times: (Such as center time, small group activities, individualized work time, etc.)

Typical causes of problem behaviors:

- child has no way of predicting how long an activity will last.
- child cannot predict how much he/she will be asked to do.

- child does not know when he/she will be able to choose an activity.
- child does not know the order in which demands will be made.

Some strategies to try:

- use a picture sequence to represent work order.
- lay out all materials in a row for work order.
- define length of activity by number of materials (for example: 6 blocks to be stacked or mark with four markers).
- use selective choice making for example the teacher lays out 3 items that can be used to accomplish the same goal, then the student selects what is most interesting.
- have a box of materials the student is to use, but have the student lay out the sequence.

Free or open play period:

Typical causes of problem behaviors:

- child has difficulty organizing himself /herself.
- child has difficulty attending to task (tries to play with many things at once or is distracted).
- child uses materials inappropriately or does not know what to do with them.
- child has difficulty initiating play with a toy.
- child has trouble sequencing play (get out one material, play, put it away and go to something else).
- child seeks excessive adult attention.

Some strategies to try:

- define play areas and boundaries clearly by using furniture (table and chair), a throw rug, or toy shelves to block off part of the room .

- limit the number of materials (one or two to choose from).
- help child select toy and have an adult or peer demonstrate how to use it or take turns with the toy.
- use a picture chart as a tool to help the child think and select something to play with and to help him move from one activity to another.
- use a timer to indicate time to switch activity areas.
- check room arrangement for traffic pathways and separate the quiet areas from the noisier ones for example gross motor away from the book area.
- decrease noise levels using carpet, curtains and other items to absorb sound.
- involve peers in participating in activities with the child with disabilities.

Group Time:

Typical causes of problem behaviors:

- child cannot wait for long periods of time without something to do or without teacher's attention.
- child cannot predict when it will be his/her turn.
- child cannot attend to group directions.
- child cannot understand words of song or directions to activities.
- child desires to leave the room or play with toys in another part of room.

Some strategies to try:

- use a concrete visual way of explaining turn taking, for example pass a hat around the circle, show name or picture of the student to indicate a turn.
- give the child something to hold onto while waiting, for example have child hold sun while waiting to put it on the calendar or a copy of the story book the teacher is reading.
- place child's carpet square or chair closer to the teacher to eliminate visual distract-

tions.

- use loop tape (a tape recording of the song that is activated by a switch) or objects to represent song.
- use objects or actions to relay meaning to the song or activity.
- eliminate distracting items from within reach of the group location
- check the length of the group time.
- consider if the activity is stimulating enough for all the children.
- alternate quiet and active times in the schedule so that many sitting activities are not in sequence.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CURRICULAR CHECKLIST

Use same routine with only gradual changes interjected (with warning)

Integrate sensory stimulation throughout the day

Integrate language strategies throughout the day

Give instructions with verbal and sign (simple, "action-like" signs) or other visual cues

Allow time for response

Be persistent in obtaining desired response

Shape self-stimulation into more appropriate behaviors or signs

Be consistent in everything (discipline, routine, etc.)

Use "Get Ready" or "Look" as verbal cues

Use a multimodal communication system

Take everything he/she gives you as a sign of communication

Develop strategies for interactions with peers and adults

Provide opportunities for choices

Social and Communication Strategies

Strategies that are directed toward teaching a child appropriate social behaviors and alternative ways to communicate are valuable. Many social skills training techniques for children with behavior problems are available in the literature. The rationale for developing a social skills training program for a child is to increase the child's success in interpersonal relationships and in the development of friends. The approach identified below analyzes the social functions by systematically identifying the child's current methods of communication, determining appropriate versus inappropriate methods, and then developing a target objective and intervention. The following list looks at six areas of social and communication functions to be evaluated.

1. To express needs and wants.
2. To request assistance.
3. To protest and communicate distress.
4. To respond to social interactions.
5. To initiate social interactions.
6. To maintain social interactions.

The following social skills training looks at the above six areas of social function through a seven step process. This format is an outline for planning a behavior intervention to increase appropriate social skills (see social skills training form in chapter 6 appendix).

Social Intervention Approach

(for example: David)

Step 1: Evaluate Skills Used for Each Social Function

1. Express wants and needs: David signs, reaches, and points.
2. Request assistance: David signs "help" and waits for assistance.

3. Communicates distress: David cries, bites, hits, scratches, signs “all done,” and self stimulates.
4. Responds to social interaction: David briefly looks and then ignores peer.
5. Initiates social interaction: David hits, grabs hair, and scratches.
6. Maintains social interaction: David does not maintain social interaction.

Step 2: Evaluate Social Functions

1. Express needs and wants: appropriate.
2. Request assistance: appropriate.
3. Communicate distress/unhappiness: mostly inappropriate.
4. Responds to social interaction: inappropriate.
5. Initiates social interaction: inappropriate.
6. Maintains social interaction: inappropriate.

Step 3: Determine Which Functions Need Modification

(David is having difficulties with the social function areas of #3, 4, 5, and 6; however, the team chose to address areas 3 and 4.)

3. Communicate distress/unhappiness.
4. Responds to social interaction.

Step 4: Identify and Evaluate Environments and Situations Relevant to Functions and Skills

When unhappy, David increases his self stimulation and hits anyone near him. He also isolates himself by hitting so the other children leave. When responding to interactions, he briefly acknowledges others (usually with prompts) and then ignores them. When initiating interaction, he usually uses aggressive means to get attention.

Step 5: Identify and Evaluate Contingencies Relevant to Functions and Skills

In all environments, David is ignored or is left alone when he chooses to respond and initiate in an aggressive manner. Too much interaction overstimulates him and his inappropriate behaviors escalate. When he does not respond, tactile methods are used to calm him so he can return to the activity.

Step 6: Operationally Define Skill and Function Goals

(Remember the two areas being targeted for changing David's behavior are # 3 and 4.)

3. Communicate distress: Sign "mad"- David will sign mad when he begins to become agitated from over stimulation or when frustrated by activities etc.
4. Responds to social interaction: Greetings- when approached, David will greet peers by wave, Macaw (communication device), or verbalization.

Step 7: Determine Skill and Function Training Methods

3. Communicate distress: When David seems to be getting agitated by too much stimulation or by an activity, the facilitator will prompt him to sign "mad" and verbally label sign. After he signs mad, a facilitator or peer can give tactile pressure to joints to calm him down. Fade when appropriate.
4. Respond to social interaction: When peers approach David, he will usually look at the peer. While he is looking, the facilitator will prompt him to greet peer by wave, Macaw, or verbalizations. The facilitator will then prompt the peer to wave and say "Hi, David" to him. Fade when appropriate.

Communicating Choices

Children have their own individual preferences, likes and dislikes. Compliance problems do not seem to occur as often in settings where child-initiated activities, movement experiences, and developmentally appropriate activities are valued

as the basis for learning. It is very easy for adults to dictate to a child with communication difficulties what they should do. Noonan and McCormick (1993) point out that children have sometimes been classified with behavior problems when the problem lies with the adult. Specifically the problems can be based on the adult's inappropriate expectations, the adult's inconsistencies or the adult's insensitivity to the child's needs and interests. Allowing the child to have opportunities throughout the day for choices, not only increases the child's motivation, it increases compliance and learning. Offering choices can be a very effective way of redirecting a child who appears intent on prolonging an inappropriate response. For example, a child who is at an activity center, but is having difficulty getting started and is busy protesting or agitating others may respond appropriately when a teacher helps the child focus his/her attention to the task. This may be done by asking "Do you want the red marker or the blue marker?" and holding the choices out to the child. It also demonstrates that the child's intent to communicate is valued. The child may need to be shown how to appropriately communicate choices by using eye gaze, communication boards and other augmentative devices, gestures and verbalization. Peers in the classroom also are a great resource for modeling appropriate ways to communicate choices, behaviors and social interactions.

Resources and References

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BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PROGRAM

| Behavior | Intervention | Consequences | Criteria |
|----------|--------------|--------------|----------|
| | | | |

Special Considerations:

WIN Grant

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SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

Functions:

1. Express needs and wants
2. Request and assistance
3. Protest or communicate distress
4. Respond to social interactions
5. Initiating social interactions
6. Maintain social interactions

Step 1: Evaluate Skills Used for Each Function

Step 2: Evaluate Social Functions

Step 3: Determine Which Functions Need Modification

Step 4: Identify and Evaluate Environments and Situations Relevant to Functions and Skills

Step 5: Identify and Evaluate Contingencies Relevant to Functions and Skills

Step 6: Operationally Define Skill and Function Goals

Step 7: Determine Skill and Function Training Methods

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